



# AMERICAN CITIZEN SERVICES

## *A Message From Ambassador Farrar*

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### ACS hours (online appointments):

- Mo - Thu  
8:00 - 12:30  
1:30 - 3:00
- Fri  
8:00 - 10:00

### FBU hours (e-mail appointments):

- Mon, Tue, Thu  
7:30 - 12:30  
1:30 - 3:00

Welcome to the first edition of our Consular Newsletter! I hope that you will find the newsletter a useful way to learn about upcoming Embassy services and activities that may be of interest to Americans and their families in Panama. We'll be including reminders on important deadlines, any upcoming changes in Embassy procedures, and advance notice on outreach visits from the Embassy to those of you outside of the Panama City area.

Speaking of outreach, we hope to do another series of Town Hall meetings with American communities around Panama this year, similar to the ones we did in 2012. My wife, Terry, and I look forward to renewing acquaintances or making new friends at one of these events in

Panama City or elsewhere.

Our Consular Section recently sent out a notice with instructions on how to report crimes to the Panamanian police, and also to the Embassy. While we all hope never to fall victim to crime, it does occur. Filing a report with the Panamanian police is essential for a crime to be investigated. Filing a separate report with our consular section enables us to track trends around the country, and to sit down with the Government of Panama and request additional security attention and resources where most needed by the American community.

Terry and I appreciate the opportunities that we have had to get to know so many of you over the past year-and-a-half. We wish you all the best in 2014 and



beyond, and look forward to seeing you during the course of the year. If you are in Panama City on March 8, please join us for our American organizations fair on the Embassy grounds from 8 to noon. In the meantime, please keep in touch, and let us all know when we're doing something well or when we don't live up to your expectations.

Jonathan Farrar

[farrarjd2@state.gov](mailto:farrarjd2@state.gov)

P. S. Take a minute to register with us. It's on-line and easy. Thank you!

## *FBU – Federal Benefits and U*

What is the Federal Benefits Unit?

We are the people who provide assistance if you receive federal benefits from the Social Security Administration, the Office of Personnel Management, the Department of Veterans Affairs, or the US Railroad Board.

The mission of the Federal Benefits Unit (FBU) is to assist claimants process federal benefit claims in an efficient, effective and customer-friendly manner.

The FBU also assist former employees of the Panama Canal Commission who suffered on-the-job injuries and receive

compensation from the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs under the U.S. Department of Labor.

For more information about the FBU, please visit the [FBU webpage](#).



## Surveying Survivors



The week of November 18, 2013, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) mailed 13,213 Marital Surveys to widows and widowers that currently receive federal benefits from a deceased federal employee. The Civil Service Retirement law establishes that surviving spouses are not permitted to remarry prior to age

55 and continue receiving a benefit. The Marital Survey is sent out in response to this law (unless they were married to the deceased for at least 30 years prior to his or her death).

This year's survey requires a response from all survivors receiving a benefit. The form must be signed and dated. A daytime telephone number is

required. All forms must be completed and returned within 30 days of the date of the form. The survey may be returned via mail or fax.

If you've not received your survey form, please contact the FBU to avoid the suspension of your benefits.

For more information on this and other Retirement Eligibility Surveys, please visit [OPM's webpage](#).

## Let Us Know You're Still Around

### Questions? Suggestions?

You can e-mail the  
Federal Benefits Unit at  
[Panama-FBU@state.gov](mailto:Panama-FBU@state.gov)

The Social Security Administration (SSA) recently informed the Embassy that there are still over 200 Social Security recipients in Panama who have not returned their proof of life forms. In June of each year these forms are sent to the mailing address recipients have on record with the SSA. A second request is

mailed in October.

If you have not yet returned your proof of life form, please contact the Federal Benefits Unit as soon as possible. The Social Security Administration began suspending benefits to recipients with no proof of life effective with the payment dated February 3, 2014.

To find when you are scheduled to receive the proof of life questionnaire, please visit the [FBU webpage](#).

## The ABCs of ACS



The American Citizen Services unit (ACS) serves U.S. citizens in Panama by providing emergency, passport, notarial, and other documentary services to U.S. citizen residents or temporary visitors. ACS also helps the families of deceased U.S. citizens make final arrangements for their loved ones; conducts welfare and whereabouts visits; provides emergency financial and medical assistance to U.S. citizens; deter-

mines acquisition and retention of U.S. citizenship and nationality; assists imprisoned U.S. citizens; and helps U.S. citizens involved in investment or business disputes.

ACS is staffed by a team of locally employed Panamanian staff and two U.S. consular officers. They are assisted by volunteer wardens, private U.S. citizens living throughout Panama.

ACS cannot intervene directly in arrests, civil cases, or other legal issues. It also cannot make Panamanian authorities adopt a particular course of action or ignore Panamanian laws and regulations.

All ACS work is carried out in accordance with publicly available [regulations](#).

For more information about ACS, please visit the [ACS webpage](#).



## Your Right to Vote from Overseas

Even though you live overseas, you can still exercise your rights as a U.S. Citizen to vote in federal and home state elections.

The Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA), as amended by the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment (MOVE) Act, requires States to transmit requested absentee ballots to U.S. citizen voters residing outside the U.S. no later than

45 days before a Federal election.

The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) works to ensure that overseas citizens are aware of their right to vote and have the tools needed to do so.

If you want to vote in a Federal Primary or Special Election you should visit [FVAP.gov](http://FVAP.gov) for information on registering to vote and requesting your absentee ballot according to State

deadlines and requirements.

If you do not receive your requested State ballot at **least 30 days** before an election you may prepare, print and sign a Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB). The backup FWAB can be easily completed by using the [FWAB online assistant](#), filling out



## The 2014 American Fair

Having a hard time hooking up with an English-speaking volunteer group, church or NGO? Then come the American Fair at the U.S. Embassy in Clayton on Saturday, March 8.

The Fair will feature civic clubs, volunteer groups, reli-

gious organizations, and community activities involving Americans and other English-speaking members of the international community. The fair will provide information about these various organizations and opportunities for involvement.

There will be no entrance fees, but we do ask that you bring a picture ID.

If you would like more information, please contact coordinator Carson Dolan at [Dolancm@state.gov](mailto:Dolancm@state.gov).

Have a question for ACS? E-mail us at [Panama-ACS@state.gov](mailto:Panama-ACS@state.gov)

## Be a Smart Traveler

The Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) is a free service for U.S. citizens traveling abroad that helps them remain informed, connected and safe.

**Stay informed** – by signing up, you will receive travel updates and information about the country you are traveling to, travel warnings, and travel alerts (where appropriate).

**Stay connected** – in the event of an emergency, the Embassy will have access to your emergency contact information. We can contact you and your loved ones help you get in touch with friends or family in the U.S.

**Stay safe** – a well-informed traveler is a safer traveler. Our country-specific information, travel alerts, travel warnings, fact sheets, and warden mes-

sages will provide you with invaluable information about any country that you may visit. We will provide you with information on possible risks and security threats so you can make informed decisions.

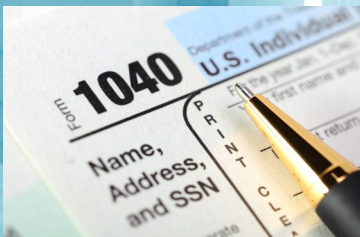
To enroll, visit the [STEP webpage](#).

To download the app visit [iTunes](#) or [Google Play](#)





## Filing Taxes Abroad



If you are a U.S. citizen or resident alien, the rules for filing income, estate, and gift tax returns and paying estimated tax are generally the same whether you are in the United States or abroad. Your worldwide income is subject to U.S. income tax, regardless of where you reside.

### When to File

If you are a U.S. citizen or resident alien residing overseas, or are in the military on duty outside the U.S., on the regular due date of your return, you are allowed an automatic 2-month extension to file your return and pay any amount due without requesting an extension. For a calendar year return, the automatic 2-month extension is to June 15.

If you are unable to file your return by the automatic 2-month extension date, you can request an additional extension to October 15 by filing Form

4868, Application for Automatic Extension of Time To File U.S. Individual Income Tax Return, before the automatic 2-month extension date. However, any tax due payments made after June 15 will be subject to both interest charges and failure to pay penalties.

### Where to File

If you are a U.S. citizen or resident alien (Green Card Holder) and you live in a foreign country, mail your U.S. tax return to:

Department of the Treasury  
Internal Revenue Service Center  
Austin, TX 73301-0215  
USA

Estimated tax payments should be mailed with form 1040-ES to:

Internal Revenue Service  
P.O. Box 1300  
Charlotte, NC 28201-1300  
USA

### Exchange Rates

You must express the amounts you report on your U.S. tax return in U.S. dollars. If you receive all or part of your income or pay some or all of your expenses in foreign currency, you must translate the foreign currency into U.S. dollars.

### How to Get Tax Help

The IRS Office in Philadelphia provides international tax assistance. This office is open Monday through Friday from 6:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. EST and can be contacted by:

Phone: 1 (267) 941-1000 (not toll-free)

FAX: 1 (267) 941-1055

Mail: Internal Revenue Service  
Philadelphia, Pa 19255-0725

For the most up-to-date information, visit the [IRS webpage](#).

The IRS app IRS2Go 4.0, will let you check refund status, free tax providers, and tax records. Available in [iTunes](#) and [Google Play](#)

## Frequently Asked Questions



**How do I become a legal permanent resident of Panama?** If you are considering moving to Panama, you should contact an [attorney](#) to help you manage the transition. The U.S. Embassy cannot provide advice on legal or residency requirements. For information on how to apply for a "Retiree or Pensioner" Visa, please visit the [Panama Tramita webpage](#). For information on other types of visas and residency, visit the [National Migration Service](#).

**I am processing my application for residency in Panama but need my FBI record, how do I get it?** You must request your record directly from the [FBI](#). You must specifically request it be FBI-Certified. For more information, to include how to apostille the record, visit the [ACS webpage](#).

**I am planning on buying real estate in Panama, do you have any recommendations?** Hire a reputable [lawyer](#)

and perform due diligence before you buy. While most U.S. citizens buy and sell property in Panama without incident, the Embassy frequently hears claims of fraud and corruption. For more information, you may wish to contact the [Real Estate Committee](#) of the American Chamber of Commerce in Panama City. You may also wish to consult the [Investing in Panama](#) chapter of the U.S. Commercial Service's Country Commercial Guide.



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*Follow us on . . .*



<http://panama.usembassy.gov/index.html>

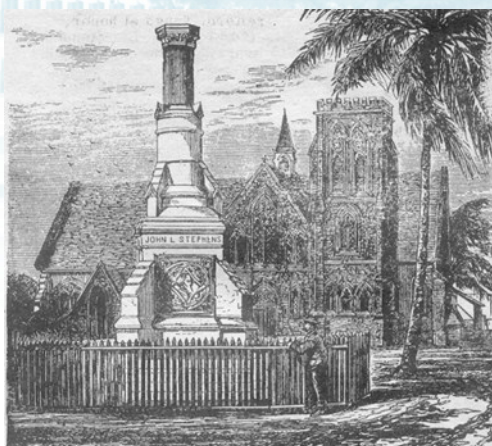
#### Upcoming ACS Visits

**Chiriqui: May, Aug,  
Nov**

**Others: TBD**

## *Did You Know? Today's Colon Was Aspinwall*

Today's city of Colon was originally named Aspinwall, after New York shipping magnate William Henry Aspinwall. Following a successful career as president of the merchant firm Howland & Aspinwall, -owner of some of the most famous clipper ships ever built – in 1848 Aspinwall founded the Pacific Mail Steamship Company to provide service to California from Panama. He also conceived a plan to construct a railway across the isthmus and thereby link the East Coast with the West Coast, a well-timed venture as the discovery of gold in California in January 1848 created a rush of emigrants wanting to cross the isthmus of Panama and go on to California. After registering the Panama Railroad Company in New York, in 1849 William Henry Aspinwall became its first president.



Monumento a Stephens Aspinwall y Chuncey constructores del Ferrocarril de Panamá.

Engraving of the monument to William Aspinwall outside Colon. The monument stands to this day.

Since there were no harbor facilities on the Atlantic side of the isthmus, it was necessary to create a town with docking facilities to unload the railroad supplies there. Starting in May 1850, what would become the city of Aspinwall was founded on the western end of a treacherously marshy islet covered with mangrove trees, known as Manzanillo Island.

During its early years the town's sizable U.S. émigré community called it Aspinwall while the city's Hispanic community called it Colon, in honor of Christopher Columbus. A compromise name of Aspinwall-Colon proved unsatisfactory and the issue festered among the towns inhabitants until in 1890 the Colombian government, then in control of Panama, instructed the postal service to return to senders all mail addressed to Aspinwall.